

THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

pro bono humani generis

1230 YORK AVENUE - NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10021-6399

Joshua Lederberg

UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR-emeritus

October 27, 2002

Mr. John Bolton
Undersecretary of State
for Arms Control and International Security
US Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr Bolton:

Doug Feith suggested I write you. (I enclose a copy of the DSB report on BW for your surplus spare time, and to identify myself.)

This is about smallpox, and a particular one of the many policy dilemmas it presents. We have been very much involved with domestic vulnerability, preparedness, vaccination, etc. -- and I have been in the thick of those discussions as adviser to DoD and DHHS and other agencies. We take the threat of attack, and in worst case bio-annihilation, seriously enough to make large domestic investments in vaccination, with costs measured in human collateral damage (side effects) as well as dollars. I hear very little about the international dimensions; though I know there is some buzz about collaborative sharing of knowledge, vaccine availability, and other defensive measures. That is not what I want to stress in this letter.

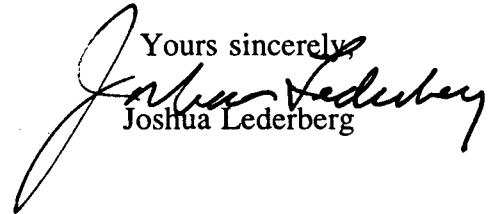
The point I do stress is the implications of a successful attack on the U.S., namely the fact that it would constitute an attack on the world. If the epidemic evades control beyond some few thousand cases in the U.S. it will inevitably escape beyond our borders and ignite world wide pandemic. The main brunt will be borne by huge populations overseas in Africa and Asia, and not overlook the Islamic constituencies there. In a word, in Saddam's hands it is a "doomsday machine".

You can check on this perception with other technical experts; I have no doubt of it. I have no position, nor information on which to base it, on Iraq's possession of smallpox, or capability or intention of using it. (He surely has anthrax! but unlike smallpox, anthrax is not readily communicable, so we do not think of pandemic spread from an anthrax attack.)

What to do with this hard fact is more problematical. Will it deter Saddam to hear that if his attack works, it carries his world down along with the US? Will it add to his capacity to intimidate and compel other wavering states to bend to his will? Will the French say the equivalent of "Better Red than dead!"? Or will it help consolidate the convergence of "allied" with our policies as to the cogency of neutralizing Saddam before that becomes impossible? I simply urge a quiet and deliberate policy analysis to anticipate possible outcomes, and help design our diplomacy.

One could argue that the doomsday metaphor applies with equal force to nuclear capability: who can believe that the reverberations of an Iraqi nuclear attack would be confined to just two states?

Secy. Powell is acquainted with me, if you should see fit to bring this to his attention.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg

cc: Doug Feith

P.S.

Another ramification is the likely, near-hysterical embargo of trade and movement of people that may be a reflex reaction to any outbreak of smallpox or strong rumor thereof. It would be appropriate, in a manner consistent with communication policies you decide to adopt wrt "doomsday" to have worked out international agreements on what the criteria for safety assurance should be to avert overwhelming economic damage. India's experience with plague in 1994 is a tocsin.